

Karla Hunt

Isaiah 6:1-13; I Cor 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Sermon for 6 Feb at StP

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be always acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

My shoulders are on fire and my arms ache: I've been here all night with Simon, James, John and the others dropping these nets into the water and then pulling them back up again, over and over. And the worst thing is, we have nothing to show for it. No fish, no nothing, which means no dinner, empty bellies and no extra to sell.

We work at night because that's when the fish come to the surface to feed and also because working at night escapes the heat of the day. It's always difficult and dirty and now as we beach the boats, we start cleaning nets. Nets catch on things under the water and get fouled with submerged vegetation and mud. Every time we fish, even though we're exhausted from the heavy work, we have to clean the nets before they dry. And now, here's this stranger who wants to use Simon's boat just when we're ready to head home for bed.

Simon is a good man; he looks at the stranger then looks at the crowds and nods to James and John. They get back in the boat and put out a little way from the shore, just enough so that the stranger can be seen and heard by all who remain ashore eagerly awaiting the words he will say. And he does not disappoint them.

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When the stranger is finished, he tells Simon to put out into deeper water and let down the nets one more time. Simon refrains from rolling his eyes but argues briefly before conceding. He signals to the others, fully expecting nothing different, and the nets descend into the depths once more. Unexpectedly, when the crew attempts to pull the nets up, the weight of the catch is more than they, or the nets, can handle. Quickly, I and the others jump into the second boat and row out to Simon. We manage to pull the nets aboard, filling first one boat and then losing fish overboard while transferring the nets to the second boat. Both vessels are full to the gunwales! And we're so excited until we start to take on water over the sides. We might sink and only some of us know how to swim! It's organized chaos as we steady the boats!

Simon looks up and gasps with the realization that he's in the presence of something, no *someone*, extraordinary. His heart is opened and he looks at this man, this stranger, this Jesus, with new eyes. He is transformed and you can see it in his face.

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" I am not worthy to be in your presence. And then he hears, "Do not be afraid..." do not be afraid, do not be afraid.

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This is exciting stuff! In the Bible we hear many exciting stories like this one that tell how God calls God's people to action.

Consider the lesson today from Isaiah: "... I am a man of unclean lips... [and] yet my eyes have seen the LORD!"

Or Jeremiah from last week, even though he protested "I am only a boy," the Lord put out a hand and touched his mouth.¹

And think of Paul! His vision on the road to Damascus may be the most dramatic of all: "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" How does one answer such a question? Paul is indeed unfit to be called an apostle if we consider only his previous actions. And yet, God calls him.

There's a common theme that runs through these narratives: the Lord calls someone who doesn't want to be called and/or doesn't believe themselves worthy or capable. Remember Jonah?² But God reassures each of them that God will be with them and will give them the words

¹ Jeremiah 1:4-10

² Jonah 1:1-3

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they need. Those who resist this vocation don't do so because they're stubborn or unwilling but there's something about being in the Divine Presence that makes one feel so very tiny and insignificant, unworthy, and incapable of doing what is asked. In the case of the prophets, the Lord does things like touching the lips or placing a burning coal against the mouth; something to indicate it is the Lord and not the prophet responsible for the message. This is important because prophets are not part of the temple hierarchy, they have no authority or official standing. Those who hear could question the prophets' right to speak in the name of the Lord and for the prophet messenger, the heavy burden of these powerful words could be difficult. It's extremely important that those who hear, know that God compels the message; the speaker really doesn't have a choice. And those who speak, who transmit the message, are faithful to the call.

PAUSE

God does indeed call in these dramatic ways but the Lord also calls in smaller, quieter ways in the course of our everyday activities. And we are not called because of how good we may or may not be. Jesus did not walk up and down the shore looking for the best fishermen, the biggest catch or the most sea-worthy boats. One commentator says "...[T]he fishermen had done nothing to warrant or merit Jesus' call to them...[They] were not called because of their qualifications, character,

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or potential. ...[T]he call ... did not come in a [sacred] place ... but in the midst of ... daily work...[which] is a further sign of ... God's kingdom reaching into the arena of human life. ... the call ... requires a reversal of priorities and a reordering of commitments." We are called the, not for our qualifications, but for our willing hearts.

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You may have seen this story in the newspaper recently.³ During the big snowstorm when so many cars were stuck on I-95 overnight, there were other roads just as treacherous. The next morning, a woman in Stafford, living on a country road in a remote area, was compelled to walk out her front door to check on a car stuck in her driveway. She says, "I started to ... see ... people walking up ... this very fast, dangerous road that *no one* walks on. We looked...down the hill and ...could see...a big semi truck jackknifed across the road and at least 10 other vehicles stuck behind them, where they'd been since...the night before." She started inviting people back to her home to get warm and fed. That day her family took in three other families, a total of 24 people. Twenty-four people to house and feed! And they all stayed for two days until the road was cleared. The host family called it divine intervention: "I'm so grateful that we ... checked...I don't know if we

³ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 31 January 2022

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would have seen them otherwise.” In the midst of her everyday activities, this woman was listening when the Lord was calling.

In the midst of our daily routine, God may reach down to touch us, tap us on the shoulder and say ‘hey, I have a job for you.’

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Here at St. Peter’s we’re blessed to have several people in various stages of discernment; that process of listening to God’s call, of feeling a Godly nudge. The Episcopal Church practices discernment in community because we need to listen to others and help them see where the Lord is calling them. Equally important, we need to know that the voice we hear belongs to God and not to our own ego. God’s call can lead to positions of leadership as representatives of the larger church and “agents of the kingdom...”⁴ This can be a significant responsibility and the call is never a charge to take lightly but discernment isn’t only for those considering ordination and discernment isn’t a call to everything but often a call to something specific.

⁴ *New Interpreters’ Bible Commentary*

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As Dorothy reminds us, the body of Christ needs hands *and* feet *and* eyes *and* ears. We are not called to do it all by ourselves but to share so that others may also be blessed by the doing.

Answering God's call is a response to God's love; we do not answer out of duty, good works will not save us, but we answer because we want to do what God wants us to do, we answer because we want to please the Lord. And God does not call us to be someone other than who we are; God calls us so that we, like Isaiah, might also say "Here am I, send me!"

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Last week we heard Dr. Hill tell us that it's "easy to retreat to places of comfort" and not fulfill God's purpose for us. There's no doubt that we all take comfort from church, especially in these difficult times. But for me, this means we are not called to attend for our own sakes only; we are called to attend for the good of the community. Perhaps you remember what we say in Eucharistic Prayer C: "Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may

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worthily serve the world in his name.”⁵ It doesn’t get much more clear than this. We are not to come for only our own comfort and healing, but also for the strength and courage to *serve*; we are called to be faithful for the sake of the world.

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Richard Rohr has said “...divine revelation [i]s not God disclosing ideas about God but God actually disclosing Godself....How we relate to God reveals how we eventually relate to everything else. And how we relate to the world is how we are actively relating to God, whether we know it or not.”⁶ It is relationship, ‘the face of the other,’ that transforms us, converts us, and gives us our deepest identity.”⁷

God calls us to be in relationship with Godself and each other, to play an active role in our communities, wherever we find them. We are called *not* because of our qualifications, but because of our loving hearts.

Where does your heart tell you that God is calling? What does the Lord have in mind for St. Peter’s, either individually or collectively?

⁵ *Book of Common Prayer*, page 372

⁶ Richard Rohr’s *Daily Meditation*, 30 January 2022

⁷ *Ibid*, 31 January 2022

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My prayer is that each member of St. Peter's be given the grace and wisdom to discern where the Lord is calling in ways large and small, ordinary and extraordinary, routine or inconvenient, and that we each also be given the courage to follow wherever God leads.

Amen.

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